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PLATOON SCHOOLS IN PRACTICE

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One of the direct results of the Gary school experiment has been a general awakening to the economic value of space utilization. The demand for a "seat for every pupil" under the ordinary form of school organization really means more than is implied. It not only involves a seat for every child in the regular classroom, but it also requires a seat in the auditorium. Space for these same children must in addition be furnished in the special rooms, such as shops and kitchens, and in the gymnasium and on the playground as well. This is obviously a tremendous waste of room provided it remains unutilized save on those occasions when it is utilized by a single class. The popular cry then means not a seat for every child but two or even three or four seats for a child.

In these days of ever-mounting cost of education the responsibility rests squarely upon every school superintendent to conserve space in the interest of the taxpayers so far as is compatible with efficiency.

Doubtless the administrative problem is much simplified by assigning a room to a class and leaving the space unoccupied when the group is sent to the special rooms, but these are times when other considerations than simplicity of administration must be the controlling factors. What then is the solution of the problem?

The extreme Gary form of organization with special teachers for each subject brought certain inevitable disadvantages. No teacher can meet a succession of classes and give each child the individual attention requisite for the best results. Instruction under these conditions is strictly a mass procedure. The individual is lost sight of. Questions of adaptation of work to individual needs, responsibility for securing the co-operation of parents, become everyone's business with the usual result, and one of the most valuable elements in a well-ordered school is largely eliminated. Again, both pupils and teachers work best in an atmosphere of quiet and repose. The constant passage of groups of children to and from classrooms tends to develop a condition the very antithesis of this desirable result. Other disadvantages equally valid might be mentioned.

Our problem then resolves itself into the question of utilizing the space-saving element of the Gary plan and at the same time retaining the desirable features, so far as possible, of the traditional type of school organization. This object seems to be realized in two of the schools in Montclair, New Jersey, by the Platoon or modified Gary scheme. Under this plan an auditorium, gymnasium, playground, shops, and kitchens must be assumed as no space can be saved in a building which contains only classrooms.

The schools in question are elementary, extending through grade six only. No attempt is made to include grades one and two since it is believed that children of these ages are best served by one teacher in the classroom method. Eight groups make up the rest of the school, two third grades, two fourth grades, two fifth grades, and two sixth grades. For these eight classes the work is divided into two general groups: (*a*) special subjects, consisting of physical training, industrial arts, geography, music, and literature; (*b*) the remaining subjects of the curriculum. The regular teacher gives instruction in the general subjects for both the A and B groups of her grade. Each group enrols theoretically thirty-five pupils. This makes the classroom teacher responsible for seventy pupils.

At the opening of school the four A groups of the respective grades report to the classroom while the four B groups report to the four special teachers. The teachers of the A groups now go through their regular program during the first session of the school undisturbed by any passage of pupils or visits from special teachers. The only transfer of pupils is in the special rooms where the four B groups go from one room to the next until the circuit is completed.

With the opening of the second session of the school a similar procedure is followed but the B groups are now with the regular teacher while the A groups are passing from one special teacher to another. The details of this plan are best understood by a study of the program for Grades 6A and 6B given on the following page.

Such a plan as this involves devoting the same time to special subjects as is given to the so-called regular subjects. This brings no complications since the New Jersey law requires that thirty minutes a day be given to physical training. Industrial arts, as taught in these schools, means more than manual training. Industrial information would be a more descriptive term. The teacher of this subject is required to keep in touch with the pupils' work in the regular classes and so shape her instruction that it has a direct connection with the lessons in the regular classroom. If the classroom teacher is discussing the Plymouth Colony then the industrial arts teacher might be constructing a colonial house of logs and equipping it in colonial style. Cotton in the classroom might mean in the industrial arts room a cotton plantation, cotton gin, loom, weaving of cloth, or any bit of construction work that would help the child to a better understanding of his history or geography lesson. The theory back of this subject is that if it is to be a watertight compartment with no relation to academic information then the arts period is largely wasted. Its value is measured in terms of the extent to which it is correlated with the other departments. A cotton project, while the geography of Alaska was being taught, would invite the sharpest criticism.

Time	Grade	Special Subject	Minutes	Grade	Regular Subject	Minutes
9:10– 9:40.	6A	Physical Training	30	6B	Arithmetic......	45
9:40–10:10.	6A	Geography......	30	6B	Spelling.........	15
10:10–10:40.	6A	Industrial Arts..	30	6B	Penmanship, Language.......	30
10:40–10:55.	Recess					
10:55–11:25.	6B	Physical Training	30	6A	Arithmetic......	30
11:25–11:55.	6B	Industrial Arts..	30	6A	Penmanship, Spelling........	30
11:55–1:00..	Noon Intermission					
1:00–1:30...	6B	Geography......	30	6A	Language.......	30
1:30–2:15...	6B	Music and Literature...........	45	6A	Reading, History, Civics..........	45
2:15–3:00...	6A	Music and Literature...........	45	6B	Reading, History, Civics.........	45

That the ideal of correlation is being realized appears from the following abstracts from teachers' reports made at the end of each month to the superintendent.

INDUSTRIAL ARTS CORRELATION REPORTS

Dyeing costumes for a sixth-grade play to correlate with literature. Development from primitive to aniline dyes. Coal tar products to correlate with geography or mining. Tools of Stone Age to compare with tools of steel in connection with steel manufacture taught in geography.

Robin Hood costumes made for pupils taking part in the play developed in literature class.

Textiles—making special study of wool taught in geography. Processes of wool manufacture, shearing, sorting, scouring, dyeing, blending, carding, spinning, weaving. Looms made, cloth woven. Same method applied to linen.

In the study of Japan the language work consisted of sentences based upon facts of that country. Sand tables showing conditions of Japanese living were prepared in geography. Industrial arts utilized the opportunity to build a Japanese home, furnished it in the manner of the country, and dressed dolls to represent the people. Japanese art was studied in connection with drawing. Back of every lesson was the conscious purpose to present every possible phase of the subject so related as to furnish the child with a connected whole.

The general plan in the industrial arts is to develop in each grade each year some phase of the six following units:

1. Food
2. Shelter
3. Clothing
4. Tools and machines
5. Utensils
6. Problems in social and industrial life.

In reports of duplicate schools frequent reference is made to the necessity for additional equipment. The Montclair method of grouping obviates all difficulties of this character. The fact that texts are furnished makes it entirely feasible, in almost all cases, to use a single set of books for both groups. The majority of textbooks are intended for the use of pupils of two or three successive grades and the limits of the ground covered by an A and B group are much less than this. Experience shows that the plan is workable when a fifth and sixth grade are thus paired. The space in the ordinary cloakroom by a little planning will serve for both classes.

Little special furniture is required. A set of wooden lockers, constructed by the local carpenter, serves to care for work in the process of completion in the industrial arts room. For this special subject square tables accommodating four pupils are provided. The ordinary bent wood chair is used for seats. This plan dispenses with the regular classroom desk and is less costly. It is an advantage to furnish the music and literature rooms with movable chairs. This permits the room to be cleared for the dramatization of stories in connection with language study. The geography room may be furnished with any type of seat, but plenty of sand tables are necessary if the teaching is to be done on a project basis. Grouping geography with the special subjects allows the collection of a wealth of geographic material such as maps, globes, charts, pictures, etc., without the duplications unavoidable when it is taught in each classroom.

By this semi-departmentalization the teacher is relieved of the need of making a daily preparation in a large number of widely varying subjects. The majority of teachers are well prepared in the core subjects of the curriculum but it is the exceptional teacher who can do equally well in the newer subjects such as music, handwork, and drawing. A reference to the program shows that the classroom teacher must prepare in only five or six subjects daily, and approximately the same preparation will serve both groups of children. More important still is the fact that this preparation is required for those subjects with which the teacher is most familiar, and that she is freed from the necessity of attending group meetings called by supervisors of special subjects.

Teachers employed for the special subjects are experts in their chosen field and this means a higher degree of efficiency than can be asked of the regular teachers. At the same time the problem of supervision is greatly simplified as the supervisor needs to visit but a single teacher in a building, and an expert at that. Her chief duty is to see to it that the different buildings are working toward a common goal.

No additional teachers are required under this plan. The eight classes indicated would require eight teachers under the traditional method of organization. With the platoon plan four class teachers and four special teachers are employed.

In practice there is a 25 per cent gain in building space. For the eight groups six regular classrooms are used, geography and industrial arts being assigned to regular rooms while physical training and music and literature use the gymnasium and auditorium.

SUMMARY

1. The Montclair plan means approximately a 25 per cent saving in building space.
2. The special subjects taught by experts give the same degree of efficiency as the regular classroom subjects.
3. Industrial arts is taught with the sole purpose of enriching and illumining the academic subjects.
4. Little or no additional equipment is necessary.
5. This plan reduces confusion in the building and places upon the classroom teacher the responsibility for the general welfare of the individual child.
6. Teachers are freed from the necessity of preparing lessons in a multiplicity of subjects and from attendance upon numerous teacher meetings.